Reflections

Reflecting on the selection of the text itself and the development of the unit plan, a particularly challenging component for us was “describing the student” who would be constructing meaning from *The Rez Sisters* (Planning 24). At first, we struggled deciding if our audience were First Nations or non-First Nations students. But we came to realize that within Ontario’s multicultural classrooms, identities are not clear to the students themselves or teachers. Therefore in the imaging of our classroom and school community, we see a diversity of identities welcoming *The Rez Sisters* as a text that gives voice to multiculturalism within its walls. The inclusion of Aboriginal voices, particularly First Nations narratives, is important within critical literacy’s mandate to disrupt the common place and to explore multiple perspectives (Taking 382). For example, while we primarily used other First Nations writers to complement Highway’s perspective, we would encourage teachers to think about using a variety of writers to bring an even greater multicultural frame to this unit.

However this is not to say that the teaching of First Nations students through First Nations narratives is an invalid endeavour. Indeed socio-cultural theory lends credence to the fact that “good units deal with a topic that somehow piques curiosity or meets students’ needs” (Planning 22).Given that 80% of Aboriginal students are in the public system, these students would benefit academically from narratives that reflects aspects of their culture within the curriculum, especially given the culturally assimilist measures taken in the name of Aboriginal education in the past and their continued educational struggles of present . So while the inclusion of First Nations voices would benefit some students in particular, the tenants of critical literacy tell us a diversity of perspectives benefits all students.

In addition to student benefits, this unit plan also helped us learn about ourselves as teachers. Through the process of selecting our own text, we realized how a much a unit’s execution depends on teacher engagement (Planning 23). By coming to it authentically, we more personally invested in its success beyond our student’s learning goals. Our own investment made the unit more rewarding as were more willing to “participate as a learner” ( 23). For the students, we were more genuinely interested in their opinions rather than waiting for them to answer with the ‘correct’ response. We also asked many questions of ourselves and experts in Aboriginal teaching such as Patty Whiteye and Bill Hill through the development of this unit. We would hopefully carry this ‘teacher as learner’ attitude further into the unit’s instruction by never claiming to be experts on Aboriginal culture, given its diversity and changing contexts. Through own experience, we could also see how a teacher’s “energetic” exploration in his/her own learning energizes students learning through “fresh texts, new assignments, and previously unexplored avenues of inquiry” ( 22). By modeling our own explorations and thinking within this unit, we will hopefully convey to students that English is not merely a class but part of a life – long process of using language tools to understand different worlds, identities and perspectives.

Clearly though, our explorations will lead to uncertainties in the potential teaching *The Rez Sisters.* While speaking to Bill Hill, he made aware of the measures he took to manage the sensitive language and topics covered in texts. He was so concerned in fact that he had personally created a ‘clean’ version of the text by redacting some language so that could be put on the stage (Hill). Although we were aware of these potential problems, Bill’s experience emphasizes teaching as a collaborative process not just between students and teachers but amongst colleagues, administers parents and the public in general.